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13 July 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Energy Research and Development  
Administration

SUBJECT : Security Conditions in Switzerland

1. The Swiss Confederation is probably the most stable country in the world. It would be difficult to think of a people that has enjoyed political and social harmony for as long a period as the Swiss. One of the best indications of this tranquillity is the strength of the nation's three major political parties. The representation of the Catholic, Radical, and Socialist parties in the lower house of parliament has not varied by more than a handful of seats since the First World War.

2. Several factors explain this internal stability. First, the Swiss people have successfully averted foreign domination since the thirteenth-century, when three small forest communities formed a defense pact that eventually led to the present-day Confederation of twenty-three cantons. This desire to preserve one's way of life is a strong, if not the strongest, element in Swiss politics today. The nation's long tradition of neutrality rests upon it. The country's success in escaping the ravages of the two world wars only reinforces its commitment to time-honored customs and traditions.

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This basic conservative ethos, coupled with the widespread desire to resist foreign elements, are the principle factors that have helped band the Swiss--

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whether they be Catholic or Protestant, French-speakers, Italian-speakers, or German-speakers--together over the past four or five centuries.

3. This long history of national unity, however, probably would have been impossible if it had not rested on a strong system of democracy. Indeed, no other country relies so heavily on the modern instruments of direct democracy--the popular initiative and the referendum. All constitutional amendments, no matter what their source, must receive the approval of a majority of the voters. The voters also have the right to force the federal government to submit most major legislation and important treaties for popular approval. The voters exercise this right frequently, passing judgment on matters ranging from proposals to expel foreign laborers to lifting the ban on the Jesuit Order in the country. The Swiss voter is in effect an essential participant in the legislative process. In keeping with this principle of decentralization, the cantonal governments retain considerable powers, in some cases making it difficult for the federal government to operate without their approval.

4. The Swiss system of direct democracy guarantees every significant cultural or political group a place in the structure of government. The Constitution recognizes four linguistic communities, each of which is fully represented--if not in the national coalition in Bern, then at least in the various cantonal councils. The sense of community throughout the nation is extraordinarily strong. All able bodied males must be either on active military duty or a member of the reserve system.

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5. There has been no serious internal disorder in recent years. The presence of large numbers of foreign workers has not triggered violent reactions from the Swiss. Indeed, the recession in 1974-75 has prompted many foreign workers to return home. In the national elections last October, the two anti-foreign parties lost nearly half their seats in parliament. The Federal

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Government has also moved to defuse the tense situation in northwestern Switzerland--the so-called Jura region--where French-speaking Catholics have been agitating to form their own separate canton. A series of plebiscites during the past two years has laid the basis for the creation of a new canton--the nation's twenty-fourth. This should put an end to the demonstrations and minor bombing incidents that have periodically taken place in the Jura region.

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